

Never Alone

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Summary:

The problem wasn't that Pennywise was developing a nagging attraction to the girl who had nearly killed him. Nor that he found himself looking for more and more excuses to steal glimpses of her from a distance, in the shadows. No, the problem was that buried beyond a wall of deepest, deepest loathing, Bev was starting to feel something, too.

1. Chapter 1

Something in the air was unusually chilly, an ominous shiver crept slowly down Bev's spine as the wind nipped at her exposed arms and shoulders. She brushed the wisps of auburn hair that had fallen on either side of her face back into her haphazard ponytail, reaching into her bag for a shawl she really hadn't thought she needed, and urged her feet forward on the lonely, familiar path home.

Ten years ago to the date, Bev had fought off her own father in self defense and left him for dead in the tiny, blood soaked bathroom that she had done her best never to think about. The voices that snaked up from the grimy drain in the sink. The balloon that popped and exploded pools of blood that could never be truly cleaned. The sickening thud her father's head had made when he collapsed onto the cold tile floor. All repressed memories that came flooding back in an unwelcome rush that always seemed to greet Bev upon her return to Derry. Because despite her best efforts, and despite every attempt she had made to ensure that Alvin Marsh was truly incapable of ever hurting her again, Bev's father had miraculously clung to some small scrap of life and was able to recover almost completely. And with that recovery came an obligation. An obligation that no matter how far Beverly ran away, she would always have her dear father waiting in Maine for her to come back to.

Usually, Bev strove to avoid all but the most necessary contact with her father. A simple phone call on his birthday and perhaps a card sent during the holidays had until very recently been more than enough to suffice. About a week before her summer internship was to start, however, Alvin had called his daughter out of the blue.

"I'm sick, Bev," was all he had said when his daughter picked up the phone. He coughed once, coughed twice, and in the awkward silence that followed he added, *"I'm sick and I'd like to see my girl one last time before I go."*

When the call disconnected and the line went blank, Bev

knew that she would have to venture back to Derry one last time. She had no desire to revisit anything or anyone from her hometown, but seeing her dying father was the right thing to do, and Beverly Marsh always did what was right.

The bus ride through the countryside should have been peaceful, but every passing hour that brought her closer to Derry filled her with dread. She had tried to read or to sleep or to daydream, anything to get her mind off of visions that returned to her after having been gone for so long. Visions of an unpleasant scene and an unpleasant someone from down in the sewers...

Bev inhaled sharply and shook her head, trying to focus on the present day and the early summer evening around her. She had gotten off the bus at a small stop near the library, marveling at the poorly drawn graffiti and the generally dilapidated state of the buildings around her. *Had everything in this town always looked so depressing? Did anyone who lived here even care at all?*

Once again, Bev felt a shiver and the hairs on her arms stood on edge. She wrapped her shawl tightly around her body as the faint light from the horizon faded into darkness. Cursing under her breath, she glanced around at the streets around her and came to a sickening realization; she was totally alone.

She quickened her pace, anxious to get indoors now more than ever. The fact that she couldn't physically see anyone didn't stop her from feeling as if she was being followed, as if there was someone lurking behind her unseen in the distance. She wanted to believe that her panic was unwarranted, but experiences from a past horror told her otherwise.

Because many times throughout her childhood, she had found herself walking down this very street taking this very route home from the library. She had been alone then, too, or at least she had thought she was. In those tense, uncomfortable weeks leading up to the confrontation, Bev had felt certain that someone, or *something*, was following her closely, watching her with great interest. She thought she was going crazy at first, until the presence of her unwanted pursuer became too unbearable to ignore. She wanted so desperately to pretend that she was merely being

tormented by her overactive imagination, and perhaps, to some degree, she was. But then again, to a greater degree, perhaps she wasn't.

It was that same disquieting knowledge that had plagued her all those years ago, one that lingered in the corners of her memory only to be awakened with a vengeance now that she had returned. A part of her wondered if she would hear him calling her name as he had then from underneath the city. Or if she might find a pair of yellow eyes stealing glances of her from once more from the shadows.

He's dead, she reminded herself firmly. *He's dead. And he, no - IT, can't bother you anymore.*

Bev steeled herself and shook away the feelings of intense discomfort that had taken root inside of her. She was nearing the final leg of her route and could see her father's house looming in the distance at the bottom of the hill. She raced towards it, eager to get inside and away from the isolated streets, away from the looming dread gathering in the air around her.

Her father opened the door before she even had the chance to knock, and it was immediately evident that he had been drinking. His bloodshot eyes raked over her body in a most unfatherly way and his lips curled into a predatory smile as he grabbed his daughter into a suffocating embrace.

"I've missed you, my girl," he slurred into Bev's ear, his hands lazily making their way down the curve of her spine.

Bev took a step back.

"How have you been feeling, daddy?" She feigned a smile of concern and gestured to the living room so that they wouldn't have to stand so awkwardly together in the narrow entryway.

Alvin waved the question away. "I've been better, that's for damn sure," and Bev noticed for the first time how frail her father had become as he limped with great effort towards the living room. He wheezed mightily and coughed into his sleeve before collapsing

into his favorite chair in front of the television.

“It was good of you to come, Bev,” he turned towards his daughter, yellowing eyes glistening with tears. “Means a lot to your old man.”

“Oh, daddy...” Bev looked at the pathetic excuse of a man in front of her and was surprised at the pit of genuine sadness forming in her stomach. Her relationship with her father had been far from ideal, but he was the only parent that she had. Even though she was a full grown woman, she couldn’t help feeling like she would soon be orphaned.

Bev stayed awake talking with her father as long as she could stand and then, once he was truly in a stupor, began to make her way upstairs to get ready for bed. She dropped her bags in her bedroom, grabbing her toothbrush from her makeup bag and turning instinctively towards the bathroom.

She paused.

Do I really want to go back in there?

Flashbacks of blood. Blood that couldn’t be cleaned. So much blood. Voices in her head clearer now than ever. The logical part of her mind told her not to worry, but panic raced through her body nonetheless.

It can’t hurt you anymore. It can’t hurt you anymore. She repeated the words again and again, refusing to be terrorized by her memories. Reaching out to turn the knob and open the door, unsure what might be waiting for her on the other side, Bev let out an involuntary gasp.

The bathroom was as clean, or at least as blood-free as it had ever been. Almost exactly the way she had remembered it, save for a few loose tiles from lack of repair and overuse. Bev breathed a sigh of relief, stepping into the tiny area in front of the area and resting her hands on either side of the sink. Fumbling for her toothbrush, she was on the verge of turning on the water faucet when she heard her father calling her from downstairs.

Bev.....Bev.....

She rolled her eyes and put her toothbrush down, turning on her heel to go see what the old man wanted.

Bev....

He began to call her louder.

Bev....BEV....

“Yes, daddy! What do you...” and before Bev could even finish her sentence, she realized, with a thrill of horror, that it wasn’t her father calling her so desperately from the living room. Not because she knew for certain that he was asleep, for he could have very well woken up from his stupor. But because the voice wasn’t coming from where her father had been sitting. In fact, the voice wasn’t even coming from downstairs at all.

Beverly.....

There was no denying it. The voice was louder now than ever. Bev turned back to the sink, eyes opened wide in horror, and found herself staring in disbelief at the drain that connected her to her nightmares.

And then she saw it.

Just a tiny red dot at first, inching its way up and out of the drain until it was there, floating in front of her. Floating just the way they always did. An ominous, red balloon.

But this one was different. It moved unnaturally, of its own volition, and Bev realized for the first time that there was writing in big, white letters on the other side.

WELCOME BACK

Before she could even process the sick significance behind the phrase, the balloon popped, and as it did the blood contained inside it burst with tremendous force all over the mirror. All over the bathroom. All over *her*.

And Beverly Marsh screamed.

2. Chapter 2

She couldn't stop screaming. The thing she had been most dreading, the one thing she had hoped beyond hope was just a distant memory was once again coming back, front and center, to haunt her. At some point, she felt herself becoming detached from her own physical being, staring down at the terrified girl below her in some sort of bizarre out of body experience. It couldn't be real, she *knew* it couldn't be real. Yet she also knew that there she was, petrified by voices that only she could hear, covered in blood that she alone could see.

She didn't bother waking her father, if her screaming hadn't already done so, because she knew such an endeavor would be pointless. He wouldn't see the blood, he never had, and besides which, this particular demon was one she would ultimately have to face on her own.

While there was nothing more that Bev wanted in this world than to leave her home and run far, far away where no monsters could ever find her, her father needed her, and she refused to leave him alone in such a delicate state. And so, she mustered up every ounce of courage she had within her, hoping that she might stand a chance at viewing the situation rationally, from a distance. She brushed the blood out of her eyes, turned on the faucet and watched as the murky blood in the sink became tinged with clear water and swirled unevenly down the drain, leaving a slimy pink residue in its wake. Grabbing a mercifully clean towel from the cabinet, Bev wiped as much of the blood from her face and her clothes as she could, staining the towel bright red and throwing it at the bottom of the waste bin as soon as she was finished.

Locking herself in her childhood bedroom, surrounded by old toys and wrapped in a heavy blanket, she somehow managed to drift into a fitful sleep filled with dreams of eerie tunnels, the Losers, and a ghastly, hideous clown.

The Losers...

When she woke up the next morning, much earlier than she would

have liked, she hurried downstairs to fix both she and her father a light breakfast. Gulping down a glass of orange juice and picking at half a bagel, Bev left a plate on the table in front of her still sleeping father and slipped quietly out through the front door.

She walked briskly down the main street, realizing it was somewhat foolish that she hadn't bothered to call ahead. Despite the fact that it wasn't a very long ways away, she really wasn't too keen on the idea of sitting in the Derry public library, waiting on someone who may or may not have even been scheduled to work that day. Or worse, having to return home alone.

Thankfully, after having climbed the steps to the library's front entrance and peering through the glass doors that led into the main checkout section, Bev was pleased to see an old friend, seated casually at the librarian's desk reading a magazine. Opening one of the heavy doors in front of her, Bev practically ran to her companion, beaming and taking in his appearance up close for the first time. Truth be told, he looked much the same as he had the last time she had seen him. He had grown his hair out a little longer, however, and he now wore reading glasses that he had never needed in his youth. But behind those glasses, his dark eyes were still as intelligent and compassionate as they always were, though they were now watching Beverly curiously.

"Mike!" She cried happily, for he was probably the only person who was still in Derry that she was actually pleased to encounter. "Mike Hanlon! You have no idea how glad I am to see you."

Mike practically did a double take. Suddenly, comprehension dawning on him, his eyes opened wide as he removed his glasses and took in the appearance of the woman standing in front of him.

"Could it really be you, Bev? I almost didn't recognize you. What on earth has brought you back to Derry?" And despite his bewilderment, he offered her a warm smile and stepped out from behind the desk to wrap her in a protective embrace.

Bev hugged him back gladly, and for the first time since

arriving back in Derry, she finally felt safe in his arms.

“Mike,” she said again, taking a step back. “I wish I were here on a happier occasion. My father’s been sick, so I’ve come to keep an eye on him and make sure he’s comfortable.”

Mike frowned slightly. “I’m sorry to hear about your father. I’ve noticed that I haven’t seen him around much lately, but when I have he hasn’t looked well. I know he appreciates you being here.”

Bev nodded her head in agreement.

“Yes, I’m sure he does.” She lowered her voice, glancing around on either side of them to make sure they wouldn’t be overheard. Her tone darkened, “but that isn’t why I’ve come to see you this morning.”

Concern was etched over Mike’s features. He placed a hand on Bev’s arm and offered a gentle squeeze of reassurance. “You look troubled, Bev. Is everything alright?”

Bev almost wanted to laugh hysterically. In her wildest dreams, she never thought she’d be standing here, in front of the group’s unofficial gatekeeper, about to unleash the news that everyone had been secretly dreading. She suddenly found it difficult to speak.

She grabbed Mike’s hand, pulling him towards the doors as if to guide him towards her father’s house.

“Let me show you.”

The first thing Bev did upon arriving back home was put some soup on the stove for her father. Thankfully, he was lying in bed, barely coherent, which was for the best because Bev knew that the last thing he needed was to catch her bringing a man with her upstairs. Once her father was comfortable and the door to his room was securely closed, Bev went back outside to get Mike.

“Coast is clear,” she whispered, and together they walked into the house and up the stairs, stopping in front of the tightly shut

bathroom door.

Bracing herself, knowing what lie waiting for her on the other side, Bev slowly pushed open the door, and though every one of her senses screamed at her to do otherwise, she entered, motioning for Mike to follow her.

She turned on the light.

The blood was still everywhere, still glistening, still sickly and wet. It was smeared on the mirror where she had tried to dry it, the bloody towel resting in the trashcan where she had thrown it the night before. She turned to look at Mike.

Mike's mouth opened, and he stood clearly perplexed as he took in the scene before him. He squinted his eyes and peered forward, rubbing the bottom of his chin with his thumb. He looked bemusedly around the bathroom, appearing, for the moment, too stunned to speak.

"I've seen this before," he said finally, eyes fixing on the blood-soaked bathtub in front of him.

"You have?" Bev gasped, startled. She didn't want to believe that the other residents in Derry were being tormented just as badly as she was.

"Yes. As a matter of fact, I have." Mike reached forward, slowly running his hand over the crack in the side of the tub, blood covering the bottoms of his palms where he touched it. He drew his hand back, and several drops of blood trickled down his fingers and onto the floor below him.

"Good news is, it should be an easy fix. You'll have to find some matching paint, of course, but that and a little bit of grout should do the trick."

Bev stood in silence several long moments, looking from Mike's familiar, smiling face to the bathroom, and back to Mike again. *What was he talking about?* She wondered in astonishment. *Why does he think I give a rat's ass about a little chink in the tiling when*

my bathroom looks like a crime scene?

Unless...

Bev gestured desperately at the various unnerving features around them, pointing to the blood-soaked sink, to the bloody towels hanging from the rack, and to the still wet blood shimmering maliciously on the bathtub.

“Don’t you see it?” She whispered frantically, almost not wanting to hear Mike’s answer.

Mike paused.

“There’s so much of it!” Bev shrieked. *“How can you not see it?”*

“Well,” he trailed off. “It’s visible now that you’ve shown me, certainly. But I don’t think I’d have noticed if you hadn’t pointed it out to me.”

He’s talking about the damned line on the bathtub again. Bev felt her heart sink and the room start to spin. She was sure she was going to faint.

Mike put a sturdy hand on her shoulder, the same sturdy hand he had used to inspect the bathtub, and Bev stifled a scream as the blood was smeared unwittingly onto the front of her sleeve.

“Are you sure you’re alright, Bev?” Mike was staring at her with great concern, completely at a loss as to why his friend was reacting so strangely. “Why don’t you just take a seat for a minute?” He pointed at the bloody top of the toilet seat and motioned for Bev to sit down there.

“No!” She shrieked, unable to contain her terror. *Why didn’t he see it?* He was a part of the Losers club, he had been tormented by the beast every bit as much as she had. Could he really not see it now?

She had to know for certain.

Steadying her breathing, steadying herself, she looked at Mike and in a voice as even as she could possibly muster, she asked him weakly;

“Don’t you see the blood?”

Mike looked around, startled. “Blood?” he stammered, looking again at all corners of the small bathroom. “What blood? Where are you seeing blood, Bev?”

“It’s everywhere,” she whispered helplessly. “On the towels, on the floor. Last night he was calling out to me, Mike, I swear it.”

“Who, Bev? What are you talking about?”

“IT!” She screamed, picking up the remnants of the popped balloon and holding it desperately in front of Mike. “This came out of my sink last night. It came out of my sink and when it popped the blood went everywhere. I couldn’t clean it. I can’t make it go away. Just like last time.”

Mike inhaled sharply, staring at his friend’s empty hands in front of him. The concern he had initially felt for Bev was turning into actual alarm. She was obviously not taking the news of her father’s illness well.

“Bev, I really wouldn’t worry,” he tried to tell her reassuringly. “It’s been ten years since we....since we....well since we dealt with this problem. You killed that *thing*, I saw it with my own eyes, and even if you hadn’t, we would still have seventeen more years...” he trailed off.

“But the blood,” Bev replied weakly. “I can see it everywhere. He’s back. IT’s back. I know he is.”

“There have been no more murders,” Mike told Bev in a voice that was firm but not at all unkind. “No children have gone missing, thankfully. Horrifying as that monster may have been, it was predictable. I have seen no signs of its return, and that should put both of us at ease.”

“I know it’s been difficult, what with your father and everything,” he continued gently. “Coming back here couldn’t have been easy for you. I really think, though, that perhaps a good night of rest might do you more good than you think.”

Mike’s words sliced through Bev like a dagger and she felt good and truly lost. Maybe it had finally happened. Maybe, after all these years, she had finally lost her mind.

“Yes,” she told Mike flatly, not wanting to bother the one person in this town who she had mistakenly thought could help her any longer. Lying through her teeth, she added; “You’re probably right. A good night’s sleep is exactly what I need.”

Mike’s anxious face broke into a relieved smile. “Exactly, Bev. A good night’s rest, and perhaps a good meal,” he grabbed the doorknob as he held open the door, and Bev tried to ignore the blood that once again coated his fingers. She thanked her friend for being so kind, for coming and talking with her and for taking a look at the crack in her bathtub.

“Promise you’ll call me, ok?” Mike said to Bev before he went, and Bev knew she meant it.

She nodded, a false, bright smile plastered across her face. “I will, Mike. Take care.”

“You too, Bev. You, too.”

She watched Mike’s retreating form, wanting to cry, or scream, or punch something. *Why didn’t he see it?* She asked herself again, totally perplexed by this strange occurrence. *Am I going crazy?*

As Bev continued to question the fabric of her very sanity, as she felt her grip on reality start to falter, somewhere, hidden far below, many miles beneath the city, Pennywise the dancing clown threw his head back and roared with laughter.